



# Words At Work:

A Guide To Pronouns In The Workplace  
And Tips For How To Promote An  
Inclusive Work Culture

ManpowerGroup is committed to do all we can to strengthen diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging within our company, and in the workplaces and communities in which we live and operate. We know from our vast experience with human capital across global labour markets that we must nurture a workplace culture that supports people feeling comfortable bringing their full selves to work, and unleash everyone's human potential.

Often, being an ally to LGBTQ+ colleagues is as simple as remembering the power that words at work have to make people feel welcomed, valued and included.



# Guide to Pronouns

Gender should be defined by the people who live it. It's important not to "misgender" your co-workers by referring to them with the wrong pronouns. In English, our most commonly used pronouns (he/she) specifically refer to a person's gender. For queer, gender nonconforming, nonbinary and transgender people, these pronouns may not fit, and can create discomfort, stress and anxiety. One [recent study showed](#) that in transgender youth, using correct pronouns and names reduces depression and suicide risks.

## Most Commonly Used Gender Pronouns

"Some people don't want to use pronouns at all and will ask you to refer to them by their name alone."



To learn more about how gender neutral pronouns are used around the world, refer to this helpful [article](#), the [ILGA World](#) and the [International Pronouns Day's](#) resources page.

# Pronoun Tips for the Workplace



## Ask if you're not sure:

Often, allyship begins with curiosity. Avoid making assumptions, and don't be afraid to ask your colleague what their pronouns are if you're not sure. It helps normalise pronoun use and shows that you respect people and want to learn.



## Put yourself in their shoes:

If you have trouble understanding why incorrect pronoun usage would upset someone, think about your pronoun (likely "he" or "she"). Now imagine someone calling you the other one, over and over and over, even after you've corrected them.



## Share your own pronouns routinely:

This encourages others to do the same and demonstrates that you understand the importance of sharing pronouns.



## Implement company policies encouraging people to respect pronouns:

Allow—rather than require—people to include their pronouns in their email signatures. It has become quite common in diverse and inclusive environments to add your gender pronouns in your email signature. This practice helps minimise misgendering and is an important strategy toward inclusivity.



## Learn from your mistakes:

If you make a mistake with someone's pronouns, it's OK to apologise and acknowledge your mistake. Then, once you know better, commit to do better.

For more information, including additional definitions or terminology, read the [United Nations' Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language](#) and the Human Rights Campaign's [Glossary of Terms](#).

# 10 Ways to Promote a Culture of Respect and Belonging for LGBTQ+ Employees

**At ManpowerGroup, we believe businesses have a responsibility to be a positive contributor to societal change. That means intentionally building diverse and inclusive workplaces and hiring the best employees based on talent without discrimination. Not only is this the right thing to do, but studies repeatedly show that inclusive practices have a positive impact on your bottom line.**

Across the hundreds of thousands of clients ManpowerGroup works with globally, we are helping our partners align their big ambitions with clear, actionable plans to hire more inclusively and keep the diverse talent they hire. Here are 10 ways to start.



**1 Do your research.** Start with the United Nations Human Rights Office's **Standards of Conduct**. Reflecting the input of hundreds of companies across diverse sectors, it offers guidance on how to respect and support the rights of LGBTQ+ people in the workplace, marketplace and community.



**2 Develop an effective—and global—corporate diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) policy.** Your policy should articulate your commitments and clearly reference sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics/intersex status. It should also explain your company's and employees' responsibilities and outline what will happen if the policy is violated. Multinational companies must also have a cohesive global implementation strategy—mindful that concepts of equal rights and fair treatment of LGBTQ+ people may not be well-institutionalised in many markets or regions.



**3 Ensure buy-in from employees and management, including commitments to take the DEIB strategy forward.** Expand employees' soft skills in empathy by exposing them to other points of view and perspectives. Regularly train them on DEIB, ensure they're familiar with your policy, and consider incentivising leaders by hard-coding your commitments into performance frameworks.



**4 Leverage technology to establish best practices.** Technology for DEIB now exists to support your company with establishing policies and practices, providing timely analytics, identifying and reducing bias, introducing greater transparency and visibility, and supporting employee training. Download the World Economic Forum's **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0 toolkit** to explore all the opportunities and accountabilities now afforded by tech.



**5 Create a culture of conscious inclusion.** A welcoming workplace is one where people with different backgrounds feel seen, heard and valued—not by blending in, but by providing a different perspective to reduce the homogeneity of attitudes, values and beliefs. This also keeps groupthink and decision-making biases in check. If your organisation is serious about allyship and equal opportunity for LGBTQ+ employees, you must go beyond programmes. To truly change culture, take proactive steps to promote a diverse pool of candidates for senior leadership and board positions, and train and incentivise managers and employees on what it means to be inclusive.



**6 Appoint leaders with these three characteristics.** A change in culture starts from the top. If your organisation is serious about its DEIB policy, start by building a diverse leadership team. Make sure people with higher levels of curiosity, humility and courage are not overlooked. Ideally, you want leaders who demonstrate a passion for learning, humility to admit when they make mistakes and courage to act boldly and speak out against injustices.



**7 Build an LGBTQ+ support network.** For pro-LGBTQ+ policies to be effective in attracting and retaining LGBTQ+ employees, your company's efforts should have high visibility. For example, support efforts by LGBTQ+ employees to create their own staff groups and extend the same opportunities to them for extracurricular activities as you would to any other group.



**8 Take it to the community.** Partnerships with local LGBTQ+ groups such as youth centres, community centres, advocacy groups and charities exhibit long-term commitment to LGBTQ+ employees. This can also help your company better understand the challenges those employees face, informing your corporate policymaking and providing a way for your company to support positive social change.



**9 Listen, apologise and learn from your mistakes.** Odds are that you will make mistakes along the way. If you've been called out for a microaggression or an act of exclusion toward an LGBTQ+ colleague or employee, it's important to respond with compassion, concern and humility. Make the other person feel heard, sincerely apologise and don't make it about you.



**10 Set targets and track your progress.** Your company's key decision-makers should receive regular progress reports on DEIB efforts, including updates on employee experience and engagement levels. Assign a senior-level officer to oversee and direct DEIB initiatives, education and training. What gets measured gets done.

For more information on how to advance inclusion in the workplace, visit ManpowerGroup's **Word on Work Hub**.